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WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Rep. Charlie Melancon (D-LA) announced today that Plaquemines Parish and St. Bernard Parish will receive a total of \$4,466,001.67 in federal disaster aid grants from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

"Federal grants like these help stabilize the local governments in our most devastated communities in south Louisiana as they continue to rebuild," said Rep. Melancon.

"I will continue to advocate in Washington for St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parishes so that they can once again become the prosperous, thriving communities we remember from before the storms."

The following grants were announced today:

- **St. Bernard Parish Sheriff's office will receive \$2,624,826.67 for the reimbursement of utility costs to house employees following Hurricane Katrina.**

The Sheriff's department provided 150 trailers for essential employees after Hurricane Katrina damaged or destroyed almost every building in the Parish. The FEMA Utility Subsidy Program for Essential Employees reimburses parish governments for the cost of paying utility bills for essential government employees still working and living in temporary housing (i.e., FEMA trailers). Without this interim housing, employees would not have been capable of remaining in the Parish and reporting to work.

The utility subsidy program was scheduled to expire in February of 2007, but Rep. Melancon was successful in extending the program until February 2008, by adding a provision to the Emergency Supplemental bill that was signed into law last May. Because of the extension, devastated parishes like St. Bernard will continue to be able to use this program as an incentive to encourage essential employees, such as law enforcement officers, to stay in the community and continue working for the parish. Rep. Melancon had previously introduced the bill H.R. 858 to extend the utility subsidy program for one year.

"Parish governments and sheriff's departments in St. Bernard and Plaquemines are

still struggling to recover from Hurricane Katrina, and the Utility Subsidy Program is one tool they depend on to help their employees stay in the community," said Rep.

Melancon.

"When

Sheriff Stephens told me last winter that this vital program was about to expire and he faced losing some of his deputies, we began working to extend the program. I am pleased we were successful and local law enforcement will continue to receive this assistance for another year."

- Plaquemines Parish will receive \$1,841,175 for debris removal and cleanup following Hurricane Katrina. The grant will reimburse the parish for the costs of private property clean up and debris removal from Hurricane Katrina. A total of approximately 105,000 cubic yards (CY) of debris, comprised of 1000 white goods items, 1,500 tires, 200 engines, 7,500 cubic yards (CY) of broken concrete, 200 air conditioners/refrigerators containing freon, and the demolished remains of 112 private residential buildings, needed to be removed and appropriately disposed of and/or recycled following the storm.

Rep. Melancon has worked in Congress to further reduce the financial burden on local governments in south Louisiana still struggling to recover from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Most recently, he worked with the Louisiana delegation and Congressional leadership to waive the 10 percent local match requirement for disaster recovery projects and allow federal Community Disaster Loans to be forgiven for localities that can not afford to repay them.

Under the federal Robert T. Stafford Act, public assistance projects like those announced today required a 10 percent cost share from local governments upfront before the remaining 90 percent in federal grant money can be used. Many of the estimated 23,000 disaster recovery projects in Louisiana had been put on hold because local governments did not have the resources to provide the match. The local match requirement has been waived 32 times since 1985 when per capita rebuilding costs have been deemed excessive, but had not yet been waived for Katrina and Rita.

Rep. Melancon worked with House leadership to include the waiver of the 10% match in the Iraq/Katrina Emergency Supplemental Appropriations bill, which was passed by Congress and signed into law by the President at the end of May. This bill provides a total of \$6.419 billion in hurricane recovery and relief funding for Louisiana and other Gulf Coast states.

In addition, Rep. Melancon successfully lobbied House leadership to include language in the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations bill making Katrina- and Rita-affected communities eligible for forgiveness of their Community Disaster Loans. An estimated \$1 billion in CDLs were provided by the federal government to hurricane-affected local governments immediately following Katrina and Rita to help them continue daily operations, such as payroll for law enforcement and emergency responders. Many local governments do not have the ability to repay this massive debt, as their tax bases were devastated by the storms. Rep. Melancon argued that, in the past, CDLs have been forgiven following many other major disasters, including Hurricane Andrew and the September 11th terrorist attacks. With the passage of the Supplemental, Katrina and Rita CDLs became eligible for forgiveness, taking a huge financial burden off of local governments in south Louisiana.

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